

The Charter Change meeting for June 29, 2011 was called to order at 1:00 p.m. at City Hall.

In attendance:

Dr. Genevieve Miller, Chairperson

Mr. John Houben

Ms. Josephine Moore

Mr. James Vincent

Absent:

Mr. Daniel Losco, City Solicitor

Mission statement was reviewed, the Charter Change Committee is a committee appointed by City Council with the mission to survey the City Charter and therefore make recommendations non-binding to Council regarding changes to the same document.

Committee concurs, that all recommendations made are just recommendations, and it will be at the discretion of the Council as to whether said changes are implemented.

Committee verified dates and times for future meetings and time allotted for meeting to run. Committee will have 2 meetings per week for the first few weeks, with changes possible as progress is made.

Committee discussed the length of the meetings; the length of the meetings will be from 1 hour to 1 1/2 hours and this can be addressed from time to time throughout the duration.

Committee discussed what pattern needs to be established to make progress through the Charter. There was also discussion as to how progress and how changes would be presented to the Council. Charter Change committee will go through Charter in order, by chapter and make changes, page, section, line on page. Chairperson Miller will write up changes and present to committee at subsequent meeting. Committee will also be looking for gender biased language, and obsolete language, and concepts.

The question was raised as to whether the Committee wanted to work in groups to tackle more than one chapter at once? The consensus was if we were a larger group that might work, but unless it becomes very time consuming the group as a whole will go through the Charter together.

General Ideas

The floor was open to general ideas. Mayors Court, should we bring it back, we would get fines and Court Fees.

Mr. Houben suggested eliminating President of Council, enlarging Council to 6 members, having 1 council person from each district, and 2 at large Council, and have the Mayor be the deciding vote. There should be accountability in attendance; there is not anything in the Charter addressing attendance.

Mr. Tom Whitehead from the audience requested to speak. He stated that presently the Board of Adjustment is made up of the Mayor, who is a resident, and the City Solicitor, who is a non-resident. The board should be up of only residents, the City Solicitor and other members should only be on the board as non-voting advisors. The Historic Area Committee also has this issue. Any non-resident members should only be on Boards as non-voting advisors. Mr. Whitehead also questioned whether there are term limits on how long someone can be on a Board.

Section 1:

No Changes on Boundaries

Section 2:

Section 2.

Discussion regarding the official name of the City. Should City name be changed from Mayor and Council of New Castle to The City of New Castle. Changing it to The City of New Castle would sound more current, like Delaware City, City of Wilmington etc.

Section 3:

Discussion of requirements for running for City office.

Section 4:

Discussion of voting procedures; and term lengths and staggered terms. Mr. Houben presented results of a poll taken on Election day of voters.

Sampling done by Mr. Houben on Election Day, when he was elected.

4 year terms 564 to 383

4 Year terms for Mayor 600 to 339

Yes to Staggered terms 566-355

Representation by District 700 – 200

Committee wants to work with City Solicitor on a plan to stagger terms, and looking at term lengths.

Section 5:

Ms. Moore questioned the fact the Election Committee is appointed for four years, and the Elected officials are elected for two yours, should these terms be consistent.

Dr. Miller stated that you would want the Election Committee appointments staggered, and to be on board for two elections. That way you don't have all new people learning election procedures every time there is an election.

Committee would like to change the times the polls are open to 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. to take into account peoples work schedules.

Ms. Moore questioned how a tie is decided. Currently the Council would decide a tie.

Mr. Houben said we should go with what the State law is. Committee decided to go over this section with City Solicitor.

Discussion of how to handle gender neutral terms and capitalization in the code.

Section 8:

Ms. Moore asked why Council would fill any vacancies, wouldn't it be better to have a special election.

Dr. Miller said that there would be a lag time before an election could take place. There is also the question of the cost of holding a special election.

Mr. Houben wondered if in case of a vacancy the next highest vote getter should assume the office that has been vacated.

Committee will discuss this section with the City Solicitor.

Section 9:

Committee thought the fine for Election Judge or Clerk of election knowingly letting someone vote who is not eligible, or not letting someone vote who is eligible should be raised from five-hundred dollars to one thousand dollars.

Section 10:

Leave this section alone.

Section 11:

Committee wanted to change this section to allow for the President of Council to assume Mayors duties without written consent. If there are circumstances where written consent could not be given, as in the case of an accident, that the Mayors duties could be continued.

Meeting adjourned: 2:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Burgmuller